



Author Name: Anna C. Dragsbaek

University: University of Houston

Program of Study: J.D. and M.P.H.

Abstract Title: The Revision of the International Health Regulations by the World Health Organization

Abstract: The old International Health Regulations, promulgated by the World Health Organization, are outdated and ineffective. Changes have been proposed to address the problems in the old International Health Regulations. This poster assesses the effectiveness of those proposed changes. Journals articles and texts discussing the history of the International Health Regulations and the proposed changes were analyzed and critiqued. Journal articles related to international health and trade were also analyzed to provide alternatives to the proposed changes to the International Health Regulations. A case study is used to demonstrate the impact on a vulnerable population in Sierra Leone, West Africa. The analysis revealed that the old International Health Regulations are outdated and ineffective. A thorough revision is necessary to keep pace with the mobile nature of modern cultures and to avoid spreading disease. However, the proposed changes have four major flaws: 1) The definition of disease is very broad and could result in overreaching; 2) The regulations are still largely ineffective because there is no sanction power behind them, which will result in lack of enforceability; 3) Member states can still “opt out” of complying with the regulations without suffering any adverse effects; and 4) There is a disincentive to report outbreaks due to the fear of adverse economic impacts that outbreaks can provoke. The strong link between socio-economic status and health is well documented. As a population attains a higher level of affluence, the health of that population also attains a higher standard. The World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization should join forces to find ways to penalize non-compliant countries through sanctions and reward compliant countries with economic benefits. Also, the reach of the regulations should be limited in scope to avoid disrupting certain cultural practices that may be offensive to westerners, but will not result in infectious disease.